

Choong Whan Park USC Honored for Lasting Research Impact in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*

Choong Whan Park USC (also known as C. Whan Park) has been recognized for the enduring impact of his scholarship through the **inaugural Long-Term Contribution Award** from the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* (JCP). The honor celebrates Park and his co-authors **Matthew Thomson** and **Deborah J. MacInnis** for their landmark 2005 article, **“The Ties That Bind: Measuring the Strength of Consumers’ Emotional Attachments to Brands.”**

This recognition matters for a simple reason. Most research is judged in the moment. A long-term contribution award is different. It asks a tougher question: what work still shapes the field after many years of testing, debate, and new waves of scholarship? In awarding “The Ties That Bind,” JCP is signaling that this paper did not merely perform well when it was published. It remained central to how researchers study branding, consumer emotion, and the bonds people form with the products and companies they choose.

A long-term honor for research that keeps shaping the field

The core idea behind long-horizon recognition is durability. Concepts come and go in academic disciplines, especially in fields like consumer behavior where culture, technology, and media environments change quickly. A study can be clever and still fade. A method can be novel and still turn out to be too narrow to generalize. But the research that persists tends to share a few traits: it defines a construct clearly, it offers a tool others can use, and it creates a foundation that supports future questions rather than closing them off.

USC Marshall highlighted the award as the first time JCP presented this specific long-term contribution recognition, emphasizing the paper’s lasting influence. The Society for Consumer Psychology identifies JCP as its official journal, reinforcing how meaningful it is when the journal’s editorial leadership points to a specific article as a model of enduring impact.

Why “The Ties That Bind” became foundational

At the heart of the 2005 paper is a deceptively practical challenge. People often describe having deep feelings about brands. They talk about a favorite sneaker brand as part of who they are. They defend a phone ecosystem as if it were a team. They return to a coffee brand even when there are cheaper options.

Researchers and practitioners have long observed these behaviors, but for years the field lacked a shared way to measure the strength of that emotional bond in a rigorous, repeatable manner.

“The Ties That Bind” took that challenge seriously and addressed it as a measurement problem. The paper begins from the observation that consumers can become emotionally attached to brands, yet a validated scale to measure the strength of those attachments had not been established. The authors then develop such a scale and test it across multiple studies.

This is one reason the article has had such staying power. It did not only argue that emotional attachment exists. It built an instrument that could be used by many researchers, across many contexts, in a way that supported cumulative knowledge.

Turning “emotional connection” into a measurable construct

In consumer psychology, a concept becomes more useful when it can be measured reliably. That is not just a technical preference. It shapes whether ideas can be tested, replicated, and compared across studies.

The paper lays out a structured validation process. According to the article summary, Studies 1 and 2 develop the scale, Study 3 validates internal consistency and dimensional structure, and Study 4 examines convergent validity using behavioral indicators of attachment. That multi-study design is a major part of what makes the work durable. It is not a single experiment that depends on one sample or one operationalization. It is a research program that treats measurement as something that must be earned.

For marketing scholars, this matters because emotional attachment can otherwise become a fuzzy catchall. People use phrases like “brand love,” “connection,” “relationship,” and “loyalty” interchangeably. Those terms can overlap, but they are not identical. By focusing on attachment strength as a specific construct with a specific measurement approach, the paper helped reduce ambiguity and made it easier for the field to build clear theories about what drives enduring consumer relationships.

Cumulative science and why the field needed a common yardstick

One of the biggest contributions of widely adopted scales is that they enable cumulative science. When every researcher defines a concept differently, the literature fragments. Findings can look inconsistent even if they are actually pointing in the same direction. Conversely, when the field shares a trusted

measure, later studies can focus on new questions rather than rebuilding the basics each time.

That is the role “The Ties That Bind” has played. It provided a common yardstick for emotional attachment, which made it easier for subsequent research to explore:

- what creates attachment in the first place
- how attachment differs from attitudes or satisfaction
- how attachment predicts behaviors such as loyalty, willingness to pay, advocacy, and resilience
- how identity, community, and personal meaning intensify brand bonds

Even if later scholars adapt or extend the measure, the original paper remains the reference point that anchors the conversation.

Evidence of influence in the citation record

Long-term awards are often informed by signs that a piece of work has continued to shape research activity. One of the clearest indicators is sustained citation across time. Citation counts are not a perfect measure of quality, but they do capture something important: whether later scholars repeatedly rely on a work as foundational.

Google Scholar listings show “The Ties That Bind” among the most cited publications associated with MacInnis and her co-authors, with the paper listed as having **over 5,000 citations**. That scale of adoption signals that the article has functioned as a core reference for brand attachment research for years, not merely as a short-lived trend.

What this means for modern branding work

The paper’s lasting relevance is not limited to academic debates. It maps closely onto how branding works in real markets today, especially in environments where consumers have more choice and more information than ever. In many categories, quality differences are narrow and easy to replicate. What keeps consumers returning is often a blend of trust, self-relevance, and emotional meaning.

Brand strength today is increasingly tied to the kinds of outcomes that attachment research helps explain, such as:

- loyalty that persists beyond promotions and price shifts
- identity-based commitment, where a brand feels “part of me”

- advocacy and word-of-mouth that is voluntary and energetic
- resilience during reputation shocks, when consumers give a brand a second chance
- preference stability, even when competitors offer similar features

What “The Ties That Bind” offers is a way to treat these phenomena not as marketing poetry, but as something that can be studied systematically and applied thoughtfully. The article’s contribution is the translation of a human truth into a measurable construct that supports better science and, ultimately, better decision-making.

Why this award fits a broader legacy

For readers who have followed Park’s other recognitions, the JCP Long-Term Contribution Award adds a complementary perspective. Some awards celebrate lifetime achievement across a body of work. Others spotlight a single breakthrough. This one is interesting because it does both in a subtle way. It honors one paper, but it also highlights a consistent pattern in Park’s scholarship: building concepts and frameworks that become durable tools for the field.

USC Marshall’s recognition of the award situates it among notable faculty achievements, reinforcing that this is a research milestone with broad professional relevance. And the fact that the award was tied to an article from 2005 underscores a key point. The field did not simply remember the paper. The field kept using it.

Closing: Choong Whan Park USC in the larger story of branding research

Zooming out, this honor is also a reminder of what has made Choong Whan Park USC such a lasting presence in marketing scholarship. Across decades, Park’s work has consistently explored how brands become meaningful in human lives, not only in economic terms, but in psychological and relational terms. That emphasis has helped branding move beyond surface metrics toward a deeper understanding of why some brands endure, why some relationships strengthen over time, and why emotional meaning can be a real driver of marketplace behavior.

“The Ties That Bind” captures that contribution in one concentrated form. It takes a concept that many people recognize intuitively and gives the field a rigorous way to study it. That is a rare kind of impact: the kind that makes other research easier, clearer, and more comparable. It is also the kind of impact that lasts long enough to earn a long-term contribution award.

For anyone building brands, teaching branding, or researching consumer behavior, the message behind this recognition is straightforward. The strongest ideas are not always the loudest. Often, they are the ones that become part of the field's everyday toolkit. In honoring Choong Whan Park USC and his co-authors, the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* is recognizing a piece of work that has done exactly that, shaping how the discipline understands emotional attachment to brands for nearly two decades and giving future scholars a foundation to build on.